

# Progress of Interaction between Urban and Rural Areas taking advantage of Japanese Style Green Tourism

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This paper examines the current interaction between urban and rural areas in Japan from two perspectives: (1) rural communities seeking collaboration with urban residents to find solutions to rural issues and (2) urban residents seeking collaboration with rural communities to find solutions to urban issues. This paper also outlines the distinguishing characteristics of Japanese-style green tourism, which is highly anticipated as a new method for revitalising rural areas, and identifies the current significance of the interaction between urban and rural areas.

**Keywords:** Interaction between Urban and Rural Areas, Japanese Style Green Tourism, Community Regeneration, Agri-Food Systems

## Introduction

Interaction between urban and rural areas has entered a new phase in Japan. Relationships between urban and rural areas are fraught with various national and international issues. With the development of globalisation, business activity has expanded beyond national boundaries and into the global arena, having a major impact on local life. As a result, local industries are declining owing to the deindustrialisation; shopping districts and small to medium retailers are declining due to the deregulation of large-scale retailers. Further, policies aiming to expand agricultural imports in support of the WTO are causing a sense of impoverishment prevailing over local economies and rural businesses. As the fundamental metabolic relationship of rural communities which provide the food supply necessary to maintain urban life spreads across national borders and the transition to non-sustainable, large-scale agricultural export increases the environmental burden, the tempestuous relationship between urban and rural areas, lacking in both durability and cyclicity, is becoming evident globally.<sup>1)</sup>

In light of such circumstances, various community-based practices have been observed in many parts of the world that aim to restore the relationship between 'food' and 'agriculture' lost through the globalisation of the food supply and the excessive emphasis on economic performance. Even in Japan, urban consumers are becoming more aware of what they eat and of the concept of

*Chisan-Chishō* (local agri-foods production-consumption systems). This serves as a means to combat various issues that have surfaced through the temporal/spatial/social estrangement of 'food' and 'agriculture'. These issues include the difficulty of maintaining food safety in the procurement of food and the 'simplification' and 'externalisation' of food. These urban consumers have been the driving force behind the new phase of interaction between urban and rural areas.

This paper examines the new phase of interaction between urban and rural areas in Japan from two perspectives: (1) issues faced by the farming industry and rural communities and their interaction with urban residents to solve these issues and (2) 'food' issues in urban areas and their interaction with the farming industry and rural communities to solve these issues. This paper also outlines the current significance of interaction between urban and rural areas on the basis of the distinguishing characteristics and emerging trends in Japanese-style 'green tourism', which is highly anticipated as a method to breathe new life into rural areas.

## 1. Issues faced by the farming industry and rural communities and their interaction with urban residents

1) Issues faced by the farming industry and rural communities

(1) Concerns about an Unstable Food Supply

Looking back at Japanese agriculture since the

war, there has been a drastic decrease in crop and paddy fields. This decrease was a result of the liberalisation of imports, stemming from the US–Japan Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement, which dealt a major blow to Japan’s wheat, soybean and feed crops. A significant reduction in restricted imports in the 1970s inevitably meant a further decrease in domestic agricultural production. The further liberalisation of agricultural produce imports, including the liberalisation of meat and orange imports (1988), the GATT Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture (1993) and the Marrakech Agreement (1995), left domestic agricultural producers crying out in despair.

Amidst the future prospects of global food supply and demand, Japan’s food self-sufficiency rate (on a calorie basis) as of 2009 has dropped to 40%. This figure was 79% in 1960, falling dramatically from 1985 onwards. Furthermore, Japan has a grain self-sufficiency rate of 28% (2007 preliminary calculation), ranking 124<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries/regions in the world, 27<sup>th</sup> of the 30 members of the OECD and the lowest of all countries with a population of 100 million or higher. Japan currently has the world’s highest net imports of agricultural produce (value of exports – value of imports). Most of Japan’s imports are from the USA, the EU, China, Australia and Canada: 70% of the total value of agricultural produce imports comes from these five countries.

Meanwhile, the world is beginning to struggle to conserve food supplies, feed supplies (feed crops for producing processed livestock products for consumption in developing nations) and energy (grain crops for bioethanol as an alternative energy source). There is growing disorder in many countries over food security, such as sudden increases in international market prices due to controls from the exporting countries. In light of these circumstances, it is clear that Japan’s food supply, which is highly dependent upon exporting countries, is quite unstable because it is vulnerable to fluctuations in international supply and demand as well as policy shifts in exporting countries.

## (2) Low Value of Agricultural Produce and Low Agricultural Income

Because of the recent, wide-ranging significant price decrease, the value of agricultural produce

that is subject to government intervention, such as rice, has dropped to the level at which it was 20 to 30 years ago. As a result, many farmers are not even able to meet the minimum production costs required to ensure further production. The value of many agricultural products that are not subject to government intervention is also decreasing. Imports of various perishable goods, especially vegetables and refrigerated products, are increasing, thereby placing more pressure on domestic production. Food products imported from Asia are highly competitive in price, presumably because of a cheap and plentiful labour force. This places domestic producers of competing products in a difficult position.

Ironically, there is an undeniably sense of income loss arising from the high dependency on agricultural income, to the extent that the government is attempting its large-scale management. Many of the ‘authorised agricultural workers’ (around 250,000 in 2010) certified by local authorities as ‘effective and stable core entities’ are facing difficulty with the decreasing selling prices and agricultural income.

## (3) Decreasing basic agricultural resources (labour force / land)

In light of these circumstances, there is also a decrease in the number of farming families. The figure in 2010, around 2.53 million, is half of the 1960 figure (6.06 million). In 1960, Japan had a farming population of more than 12 million; the 2010 figure is one-fifth of that, at 2.61 million. The farming population is also steadily aging, with an average age of 65.8 years old. Conversely, since 1990, there has been an increase in new farmers who are not from farming families, either coming in fresh to the industry, or leaving another job for farming. In 2009, 670,000 new farmers entered the industry, but this did little to reduce the losses in the aging farming population.

In 1960, Japan had a total of 6.07 million hectares of agricultural land. By 2010, this had reduced to 4.61 million hectares. The total planting area, which indicates the amount of agricultural land actually in use, dropped dramatically from 8.13 million hectares in 1960 to 4.24 million hectares in 2010. Consequently, the arable land usage rate dropped to 92.1%. Another serious problem is the

abandonment of cultivation due to the low value of produce and a shortage of farmers due to aging. According to the Census of Agriculture and Fishery (2010), the amount of abandoned arable land increased from 530,000 hectares in 2000 to 3.96 million hectares in 2010. The rate of land abandonment rose from 8.1% to 10.6% within 10 years. Farms in semi-mountainous regions, which cover around 70% of Japan's land area, account for around 40% of the country's farming population, agricultural land and agricultural production. However, owing to various factors such as sloping land, many of these farms have less favourable conditions for farming than have farms on flat land. These farms have an increasing proportion of abandoned land. Thus, farming families and agricultural labour, indispensable for the sustainable development of agriculture and agricultural communities, are rapidly decreasing, as are basic resources such as land.

#### (4) Rapid Decline in Rural Areas

Many of Japan's rural areas are becoming depopulated. While these areas have long been subject to severe circumstances, in recent years there has been an increase in 'sparsely-populated' areas, 'villages no longer inhabited' and 'villages that are very likely to have a population of zero in the near future'. At present, more than half of all village residents are over the age of 65, and 'marginal villages' -villages that have lost their community functions- are becoming increasingly common.

Under these circumstances, there is a threat not only to agricultural production and the conservation and management of local resources such as agricultural land but also to the very existence of a village. With the destruction of mountain forests and the increase in abandoned farmlands and overgrown plantations, risks of natural disasters and harm to local wildlife continue, further accelerating the decline of rural areas. Farming families and residents of rural areas are facing difficulty in conserving and maintaining the land by themselves.

#### 2) Interaction with Urban Residents to Solve the Issues

As mentioned above, owing to the harsh realities faced by agriculture and agricultural communities, rural areas are beginning to explore possible interactions with urban residents. Initiatives to combine forces with urban residents in preserving agricultural land and those to actively address rural needs relating to health, safety and purpose are deepening people's understanding of the sustainable development of agriculture and agricultural communities.

Past experiences indicate that agriculture and agricultural communities directly adjoining urban areas require extensive understanding and support from urban residents. Such support is provided through efforts to promote the survival and establishment of urban agriculture, such as abolishing residential-type taxation on farmland and creating special categories for agricultural land in areas marked for urbanisation. Rural areas are exploring ways of interacting with urban residents. These include holding signature campaigns and discussion meetings with urban residents as well as providing them with land for planting, selling fresh and safe produce at morning markets or farmers' markets and educating people about diet by providing local produce for school lunches or holding events such as agricultural fairs.

Given the survival crisis of agriculture and agricultural communities in the semi-mountainous regions, as mentioned below, Japan has begun various unique 'green tourism' initiatives. These include holding morning markets and farmers' markets, establishing farming family/community restaurants, implementing an ownership system for terraced fields and orchards, introducing farm stays to encourage educational travel, establishing short-stay allotment gardens for urban residents interested in weekend country living and introducing working holidays to promote migration to rural villages. Most importantly, as these interactions become more common, the urban-rural relationship begins to progress from a face-to-face relationship of selling produce at stalls to an experiencing-the-lifestyle relationship that can only be gained by dining and lodging with hard-working farming families.

These initiatives for interaction between urban

and rural areas vary in purpose and manner according to time and place. However, they are all based on independent/autonomous action by individual farming families rather than relying on existing organisations such as local governments or agricultural cooperatives. In many cases, the driving forces behind the rethinking and commercialisation of the resources unique to a village are the farmers' wives and the elderly. In this new phase of interaction between urban and rural areas, these individuals appear to be reviving the value and pride in farming and making a living in agricultural villages.

## **2. Food Issues in Urban Areas and their Interactions with the Farming Industry and Rural Communities**

### **1) Food Issues in Urban Areas**

#### **(1) Concerns about Food Safety**

In recent years, repeated incidents and accidents related to food safety have occurred in Japan. In 1996 an incident of mass food poisoning from *Escherichia coli* O 157 occurred in Sakai, Osaka Prefecture. Then, in 2000, another incident of food poisoning occurred when *Staphylococcus aureus* got mixed in low-fat milk produced by a major dairy manufacturer. This was followed by a confirmed case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy infection in Japan in 2001. The following year, pesticide residue was detected in frozen vegetables imported from China and the sale and use of unregistered agricultural chemicals in Japan was also discovered. In 2003, an event of the concealment of production regions of imported vegetables came to light. In 2007, several food-related scandals, such as the concealment of labels and falsifying of use-by dates, were reported. In 2008, a case of food poisoning from organophosphate insecticide methamidophos mixed into frozen dumplings from China occurred. These incidents have resulted in an unprecedented rise in food *safety* concerns.

In light of such circumstances, the government enacted the *Basic Law on Food Safety*, and in 2003 established the Food Safety Commission as an independent agency under the Cabinet responsible for objectively determining food safety. In 2000, it was made mandatory to display the place of origin on perishable food products, and in 2001, it also

became necessary to list the ingredients of processed foods, label genetically modified foods and certify organic produce according to the *Revised JAS Law*. In 2002, it also became mandatory to display the place of origin of pickled vegetables. The *Guidelines for Labelling Specially Cultivated Crops* were revised in 2004, and the *Guidelines for Displaying Place of Origin for the Restaurant Industry* were implemented in 2005. Through these measures, the food labelling system became stricter and more comprehensive in order to enable consumers to make decisions on product choices appropriate for themselves.

Consequently, an increasing proportion of consumers began to read the label on the back of the package before buying a food product, as evidenced by various monitoring studies. Meanwhile, there were also notable developments in the food industry to accommodate consumer consciousness, such as procuring ingredients through contract agreements with domestic production regions and manufacturers. However, since many of the repeated incidents and accidents of the past were caused by moral hazards in the food industry, consumer suspicion concerning food safety continues to grow.

#### **(2) Estrangement of Food (Consumption) and Agriculture (Production) through the 'Externalisation' of Food**

Given the social progress of women and the decrease in family size since Japan's post-war period of rapid economic growth, there have been major changes in eating habits and lifestyles in Japan. Changes in eating habits, symbolised by Westernisation and diversification, have meant an increased dependency on bread and noodles as convenience food instead of a rice-based diet. Processed foods are also used more frequently. Consumer lifestyles have become even more diversified through changes in family structures, especially in urban areas, with nuclear families and double incomes becoming the norm and the number of elderly households on the rise.

Other issues have been identified in recent years, such as higher fat intake and irregular eating patterns, which are closely linked to the 'externalisation' of food. 'Externalisation' is a concept denoting the idea that food consumption



has shifted from 'eating in' -purchasing fresh ingredients and preparing and consuming them at home- to relying more on 'eating out' or on ready-made meals - purchasing cooked food or packaged meals and consuming them at home.

Looking at the food externalisation ratio (2007) estimated from the Family Income and Expenditure Survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Statistics Bureau, externalisation accounts for 48.2% of consumer spending (ready-made meals: 12.9%, eating out: 35.3%). Recent trends indicate that while the tendency to eat out is decreasing that to purchase ready-made meals is growing considerably. This is confirmed by displays on department store and supermarket shelves, which overflow with various types of pre-prepared food products to meet the diverse consumer needs. There is competition among food manufacturers to develop a great variety of commodities in order to tap into the ready-made meal market, using concepts such as 'Meal Solution' or 'Home Meal Replacement'.

Causes for the externalisation of food include (1) the social progress of women accompanied by an increasing need to simplify housework and (2) a decline in the birth rate and an increase in the number of elderly or independent households, accompanied by a decrease in the size of consumer units. These days, scenes in which the entire family spends time together around the dinner table are rapidly disappearing, to the extent that another issue is emerging: 'eating in isolation' due to differing schedules of household members.

Incidentally, the externalisation of food has further complicated the food supply routes and widened the spatial, temporal and social gap between food (consumption) and agriculture (production), which once went hand in hand. Many food-related preparation processes are becoming detached from the home and entrusted to the food industry, which provides options such as prepared food and eating out. This means that there are fewer opportunities to reflect upon the processes of agricultural production - to consider when, where, how and by whom the food on our dining tables was made. As a result, even though modern consumers are greatly concerned about food safety and functionality, they have little understanding of agricultural production, the

source of their food. Another unfortunate consequence is that basic food knowledge and cooking methods and techniques that, even a decade ago, were passed down within families as a matter of course are now no longer being passed down. This is a high price to pay for the pursuit of convenience and a powerful reason to advocate the necessity of the establishment of a national movement of multidisciplinary dietary education (food and agriculture education) by the government.

### (3) Concern over Issues caused by the Globalisation of Food Supplies

The following traits are characteristic of ingredient procurement by the food industry, the major player in the externalisation of food: (1) There is an increase in the use of intermediary ingredients which have undergone some processing, such as drying, freezing or preserving, rather than using freshly harvested ingredients. (2) Where processed ingredients are used, there is a greater degree of dependence on imported ingredients rather than domestic produce.<sup>2)</sup> Furthermore, processed vegetables are no longer imported only in times of necessity, such as shortfalls in domestic harvests or when crops are out of season, but are being supplied throughout the year from all over the world through a planned production and supply system targeted at the Japanese market. Japan is signing contracts with local producers and importing items under technical assistance agreements specifying the breed and cultivation methods. This is epitomised by 'develop-and-import' schemes, in which ingredients are processed or prepared specifically for Japan. The main players in this market are Japanese trading companies and the Japanese food processing industry.

Generally, the food processing industry is mainly concerned with a reliable supply of ingredients, the price of ingredients and the cost of processing and manufacturing intermediary ingredients. Consequently, manufacturing bases have been transferred to areas where a cheap and plentiful labour force is available and where the introduction of foreign capital allows for an easing up of official restrictions and environmental regulations on waste disposal. However, international labour

division trade mechanisms under the WTO have had an increasing impact on the ecosystem in partner countries. Such impacts include the destruction of nature and environmental pollution, which hinders sound economic development in the partner country; the loss of local food habits and food culture and a lack of risk communication which ensures food safety.

Given the rising interest in environmental and resource issues in recent years, some urban residents are beginning to re-examine the interaction between urban and rural areas. The allure of agricultural communities, overflowing with nature and vitality, to urban residents is proof that urban residents are discontent with the receding amounts of green spaces and deterioration of the scenery in urban areas accompanied by the loss of 'agricultural landscapes'. The Great Hanshin Earthquake taught the nation to 'build resilience against disaster' that would enable citizens to live with peace of mind. This perspective emphasises the role of agricultural land in urban areas as a food supply base in times of disaster and also as a space for disaster prevention.

The extravagance of modern society, symbolised by 'mass production, mass consumption and mass disposal', has reached its limits. Issues concerning rubbish and environment are worsening, and creating a sustainable, recycling-oriented society is now an urgent matter. There is an increasing awareness about the importance of developing systems for circulating the large volumes of organic waste matter originating from household food scraps and the food industry, such as using land for composting and leftover food products as animal feed. Previously unseen aspects of regional agriculture and the importance of its role and function are now becoming apparent.

## 2) Interactions with the Farming Industry and Rural Communities to Solve the Issues

The aforementioned food-related issues and concerns of urban residents are not unique to Japan, and therefore efforts to solve them are also common to many countries. These include, for example, the *Community-Supported Agriculture* (CSA) movement in the USA, a major exporter of agricultural produce; the *Slow Food* movement which has spread worldwide from a small rural

community in Italy; the *Food Mileage* concept advocated by consumer movements in the UK and the *Chisan-Chishō* movement in Japan. Each of these initiatives advocates food sovereignty, and they are spreading throughout their respective countries and regions as the antitheses to the globalisation of food supplies.

Farmers' markets, a typical *Chisan-Chishō* initiative, have grown as points of exchange between urban and rural areas through 'face-to-face' distribution and are being supported by numerous frequent customers. This proves that urban residents through their own actions are exploring their estranged relationship with agriculture in order to regain their confidence in food. Farmers' markets provide a base for the Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives to promote 'coexistence with consumers'. At its 2003 national convention, it determined that all agricultural cooperatives should establish farmer's markets within their jurisdiction. Subsequently, large-scale cooperative-run farmers' markets were established all over the country.

Incidentally, Japan has a history of interaction between consumers and cooperatives, typified by direct cooperative transactions between consumers and producers and influenced by the CSA movement. These direct cooperative transactions, which gained popularity because of the incidents of food contamination in the 1970s, are more than just an opportunity to buy agricultural produce directly: they have developed into an opportunity for urban residents to at least partially participate in agricultural production processes. The members (urban residents) travel to the place of production, interact with the producers and experience farm work. When supermarkets began the reorganisation of the retail industry, direct cooperative transactions faced various difficulties such as the issue of concealment of the place of production. However, this does not change the fact that they have played a significant role in the interaction between urban and rural areas and are resolutely continuing their efforts even today.

Movements to capture the agricultural industry and agricultural communities' anticipated role in food education regarding the sources of food supplies have spread from urban areas to primary and middle schools across the country. Under the *Basic Program for Promoting Food Education* (2006),

the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries established education farms which provide opportunities to experience farm work under the guidance of workers in the forestry, agriculture and fishing industries and help people gain a better understanding of the various activities of those working with food and nature. Approximately 80% of cities, towns and villages nationwide participated in this initiative. Furthermore, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries initiated the Children and Agricultural Communities Interaction Project. This joint project promoted long-term boarding experiences in agricultural communities as educational activities for primary school children to support their strong growth, foster their desire to learn and help them gain a sense of independence, sympathy for others and awareness of social norms. The project aimed to host around 1.2 million fifth-graders from primary schools across the country in week-long stays in agricultural communities within a five-year period, starting in 2008. By 2010, 115 'model accepting sectors' (as prototypes/trial systems) had been designated; however, various ripple effects were observed in the recipient communities and participating schools.

In 2009, a revised *School Lunch Programme Act* was launched for primary and middle school children, which was aimed at 'food education' instead of the previous aim of 'improved nutrition'. This was the first major revision to the School Lunch Programme Act since its enactment in 1954. The revised programme sought to utilise school lunches as a real-life teaching material in dietary education, by incorporating changes such as promoting the use of local industries (*Chisan-Chishō*), expanding the practice of using rice in school lunches and providing local-style meals. It is hoped that these initiatives will expand to include wide-ranging interaction with rural areas for urban schools which have no farms nearby.

Finally, let us discuss the role of allotment gardens. These gardens have been established across the country to meet the strong need of urban residents to become familiar with the soil and to grow safe, fresh vegetables for their own consumption. However, in many cases, these

gardens are managed in such ways that do not necessarily result in interaction between rural farmers and land users (urban residents). This has given rise to a problem: instead of becoming a means for fostering urban residents' understanding of agriculture, these plots are actually becoming an eyesore on the cityscape through haphazard land use by urban residents who lack in both knowledge and skills. However, in recent years, initiatives that enable users to gain allotment experience through 'allotment use systems' have been gaining popularity. Urban residents aspiring to become farmers can interact with farmers at a deeper level by working alongside them, and farmers can also use these allotment systems to secure potential new farm workers.

### 3. Green Tourism and Promoting Interaction between Urban and Rural Areas

#### 1) Various Styles of Japanese Green Tourism Supporting Interaction between Urban and Rural Areas

In recent years, much attention has been paid to 'green tourism', which is defined as 'a travel-type pursuit for enjoying the nature, culture and interaction with people in rural areas abounding in nature'.<sup>3)</sup>

Essentially, green tourism is a style of travel popular in Europe, which involves enjoying holidays and leisure time by staying and relaxing in rural communities. The idea is also recognised in Japan, albeit in a slightly different form owing to different social circumstances, such as the holiday system.<sup>4)</sup> For example, in a study by the Organisation for Urban-Rural Interchange Revitalisation, approximately 30% of respondents had heard of the term 'green tourism' (they were not asked if they understood the meaning).<sup>5)</sup> The same study also examined people's level of familiarity with the term 'food education' and found that while about 80% of respondents had heard of the term, approximately 70% of them also felt that personally experiencing a place of production (agricultural community) was 'necessary' for learning about the importance of food. Furthermore, a Cabinet survey question examined people's desire to live in rural areas. Dividing the respondents by age, more people in the age group of 20–29 years (30.3%) responded that they would like to live in a rural

area than did the baby boomers in the age group of 50–59 years (28.5%).<sup>6)</sup>

These results show that urban residents do have a great amount of interest in agriculture and rural communities as the source of the food supply and their interest does not stop at food or cooking. They are also beginning to recognise the value of resources unique to rural areas, such as nature and scenery, culture, history and customs. Interestingly, while rural life appeals to the baby boomers as a place of relaxation and healing with a sense of nostalgia, it also appeals to the younger generations, who have no experience of agricultural life, as a place of learning that offers new surprises and discoveries.

The term ‘coexistence and convection between urban and rural areas’ has appeared repeatedly in government policies and projects. This term refers to initiatives to promote a new lifestyle of interaction between urban and rural areas, allowing urban and rural residents to share a fascination for each other’s regions and activating the exchange of ‘people, things and information’. Green tourism is an exemplary initiative at the core of these endeavours.

Japanese-style green tourism evolved from a failed rural resort development initiative in the early 1990s. Unlike European-style green tourism which involves long-term stays, Japanese-style green tourism is characterised by weekend or day trips. Although small in scale, these trips allow high-quality interactions between urban and rural residents. In recent years, there have been various developments in green tourism strengthened by community-based practices such as local production for local consumption and the promotion of food education (Fig. 1).

In Europe, most green tourism facilities are managed privately, mainly comprising farm stays and home stays. In Japan, however, many facilities are managed by regional management bodies such as local governments, rural family groups, producer associations that include the Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives, the National Federation of Forest Owners’ Cooperative Association and the Japan Fisheries Cooperative, or joint ventures between the public and private sectors.<sup>7)</sup>

In that sense, the key to developing Japanese-style green tourism is a proper application of government policies and projects to revitalise regional economies and construction of regional networks for farmers’ markets, agricultural restaurants and other rural experience facilities. In fact, the majority of cities, towns and villages are reporting that green tourism initiatives have produced better results than expected in other areas. These include ‘the ripple effect from sightseeing’, ‘expanding market for local specialty products’ and even ‘increased new employment opportunities’ [Note 8].<sup>8)</sup> For example, in Taka (formerly Yachiyo), Hyogo Prefecture, various initiatives such as short-stay allotment gardens have contributed ¥770 million to the economy in direct benefits and ¥1.2 billion in positive spill-over benefits.

There is a fear that with the decreasing birth rate and aging population, the disparity between urban and rural areas will widen. However, rural areas are regaining their appeal, as can be seen in new movements to revitalise the relationship between food and agriculture. If rural areas can work together with the people flowing in from urban areas, discover new local resources or reassess existing ones and enhance themselves further

Coexistence/Convection between Urban and Rural Areas						
Day trips		Short term	Long term	(Short stay)	Dual residency	Permanent residency
Green tourism		Farm volunteers				
		Short-stay allotment gardens				
	Farm experience for children					
	Utilising allotment gardens, various farm-work experiences					
		Utilising farm stays/home stays				
	Utilising tourist gardens					
	Utilising Agricultural Restaurants					
	Utilising Farmers’ markets					

Figure 1: Japanese-Style Green Tourism Initiatives to Support Interaction between Urban and Rural Areas (Source: MAFF)



through commercialisation or other initiatives, they can gain the perfect conditions that would allow them to be revitalised from within.

## 2) Development of Japanese-Style Green Tourism

Four methods for developing Japanese-style green tourism are particularly noteworthy in terms of achieving high-quality exchange: farmers' markets, allotment gardens, farm stays and working holidays. Each of these methods are outlined briefly below.

### (1) Farmers' markets

Farmers' markets began in the 1970s as unmanned, fixed-hours stalls. In light of the rising expectations for food safety in recent years, farmers' markets have grown in popularity across the country as a face-to-face means of distribution between producers and consumers. What distinguishes Japanese produce stalls from those in other countries is an increase in large-scale permanent stalls, typically managed by CUAC or established at roadside stations, creating ideal conditions for repeat customers to interact with producers on a daily basis.

In recent years, such markets have become involved in other active movements, such as establishing restaurants using local produce or other eat-in facilities. Some have diversified to become the point of contact for various events or agricultural experiences. These stalls have contributed to the revitalisation of regional agriculture in terms of increasing potential productivity through ensuring a market for non-standard products (cash income), raising the position of women and the elderly in management and increasing the number of farming families making sales. At the same time, they have played an important role as a test market for urban-rural exchange, providing a sense of food safety.

### (2) Allotment Gardens

Short-stay allotment gardens with cottages in semi-mountainous regions are effective in reducing the amount of farmland being abandoned. At the same time, they play a role in attracting urban residents into a dual residency lifestyle, such

as weekend country living, which is becoming increasingly popular among urban residents.

Many allotment gardens have been established in areas near cities because of strong demand from urban residents. While these have contributed to increasing urban residents' understanding of agriculture, it has been difficult to find farming families willing to lease out land because this requires a land lease scheme (establishing lease rights, etc.) for land users and farmers have been wary of tax issues such as deferred tax payments. However, in recent years, there has been a movement to solve these issues through an allotment usage scheme (without lease rights) in which farmers engage land users in farm work as part of the management of the allotment. This has drawn some attention as a new business model for urban farming.

### (3) Farm Stays

In recent years, there has been a growing trend in educational travel aimed at providing schoolchildren with opportunities to stay in rural communities. There are growing hopes for farm stays, which allow guests to stay with farming families and experience work and life on a farm. The aforementioned 'Children and Agricultural Communities Interaction Project (2008–Present)' has prompted an increase in the number of farm stays in host regions, and these initiatives are gaining momentum in many places across the country.

It has been identified that such homestays provide host regions with the economic benefit of additional income and various social benefits, such as giving the elderly new purpose in life and revitalising community activities. In addition, these initiatives are also extremely important in promoting the independence of rural women as individuals, who often form the core of these initiatives. For participants, even a short stay of one or two nights is a highly valued opportunity to interact with the 'life and heart' of farming families, something quite difficult to experience in the city. In many cases, effective integration of the experience into the learning curriculum beforehand and afterwards has yielded highly fruitful learning outcomes. Compared with European farm stays, in

which guests stay for longer periods in B&Bs or self-catering accommodation, the exchange-style farm stay is unique to Japan.

#### (4) Working Holidays

This term usually refers to a system intended to promote international understanding which provides temporary work opportunities to earn some extra money while holidaying overseas. In the case of Japan, however, it refers to an arrangement in which rural families provide food and board to urban residents, who are interested in agriculture and agricultural communities, in exchange for help with farm work when there is a shortage of labour on the farm. There are unpaid schemes such as that implemented in Iida, Nagano Prefecture, and paid schemes such as the one in Nishimera, Miyazaki Prefecture. Many towns and villages with a shortage of work hands are beginning to explore the idea of introducing such a scheme.

Iida, being further ahead in the process, has calculated the benefits of working holidays. These include the advancement of agriculture (improved efficiency in time-critical jobs, greater desire for farming, further economic activity taking place afterwards), promotion of residency (new farmers entering the industry, promotion of U/J/I turns into other industries, enabling mutual identification of suitability for migration) and advancement in tourism (interest in the region, promotion by word of mouth). The number of participants is steadily increasing, particularly among baby boomers and young women.

#### **4. New Developments in the Interaction between Urban and Rural Areas and Initial Movements towards Revitalising Rural Areas**

As seen above, many new developments have taken place in the interaction between urban and rural areas in recent years. Although these initiatives have mostly begun in rural areas, they have also provided clues to solving the concerns and issues faced by the globalised urban society and are a vital in promoting policies aimed at balanced nation-building and creating a sustainable, recycling-oriented society. More importantly, however, new developments in the

interaction between urban and rural areas lead to the revitalisation of rural areas where these initiatives take place.

To conclude, let us examine the early signs of change that these developments in the interaction between urban and rural areas are making concerning the revitalisation of rural areas. First, the individuality of farming women (promoting independence) is beginning to take hold throughout rural communities. These women have played a major role in using the interaction between urban and rural areas as an opportunity for a series of initiatives to diversify farm operations and start new undertakings such as produce stalls, processing and selling local specialty goods, family or community restaurants that utilise local ingredients and farm stays. Farm stays have gained in popularity in many places in recent years. Combined with the developments in deregulation at the local government level, future prospects for farm stays are drawing some attention as a magnet for educational travel, such as the Children and Agricultural Communities Interaction Project. The choice to become involved with hosting guests has served as a test of whether farming women will break out from the closed nature of rural society and the nay-saying norm and establish their individuality.<sup>9)</sup>

Second, urban residents have high hopes from rural communities, which abound in local resources, as a 'place of relaxation, healing and learning'. Such interest has restored in rural residents a sense of pride in their home regions, which had been lost in the course of post-war rapid economic growth.<sup>10)</sup> In that sense, green tourism can be perceived as 'a proactive lifestyle choice by farming women and the elderly in rural communities, the mainstay of these initiatives'.<sup>11)</sup>

Third, the gaining popularity of initiatives such as working holidays, which provide labour for busy farmers in exchange for farming experience or reduced accommodation expenses, has encouraged urban residents to migrate and settle in rural communities and helped to ensure that assistance is available for agricultural production and livelihoods. For example, many urban residents have taken working holidays in Iida, Nagano Prefecture, which provides them with an opportunity to have a trial period of migrating to a rural community and allows rural residents to

check the suitability of potential migrants. When these urban residents actually enter the farming industry, the farming families which hosted them during their training period act as foster families to these newcomers, ensuring that they have a place to stay and land on which to work and giving them some credibility within the community.<sup>12)</sup>

Finally, in many regions, 'tourism university' style learning is taking place through private initiatives. This has led to personnel training initiatives that develop opportunities for learning holidays, aimed at community development through widespread collaboration. Clearly, being quite different from mere sightseeing experiences, these initiatives aim to enhance quality (creating independence among rural residents and fostering an understanding of rural areas among urban residents), rather than quantity (increase in the number of people involved in the exchange). This provides an excellent opportunity to forge regional strengths rather than simply drawing the attention of urban residents.

## Notes

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